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SUBJECT: CHINA STANDING BY ON AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs  
Aubrey Carlson, reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

11. (C) Chinese eyes are focused intently on U.S. plans for, and action in, Afghanistan and Pakistan, an area the Chinese see as a dangerously unstable, interconnected threat to Chinese security - but one that they are uncertain about how to address. China has mixed feelings about U.S. involvement in the region, viewing U.S. engagement as needed for security and stability but alarming in that it moves the front lines of the war on terrorism to China's back door and raises the possibility of a prolonged U.S. troop presence on China's border. China is engaged in some aid and assistance of different kinds to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and wants to hear from the United States about what more it can do. Troop contributions, our contacts say, are out of the question. END SUMMARY.

Symbiotic Relationship between Afghan and Pakistan Security

12. (C) Our Chinese MFA and academic contacts repeatedly underscored in recent meetings the interconnected relationship between Afghan and Pakistan security. MFA Asian Affairs Department Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh Division Deputy Director Xu Wei said March 6 the two countries were "so connected" that the Afghanistan situation could not be stabilized without addressing the Pakistan issue. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) scholar Ye Hailin said on February 25 that Afghanistan and Pakistan were "two sides of the same coin."

Terrorism and China's Security

13. (C) MFA and academic contacts emphasized to PolOff the threat that South Asian terrorism (and Afghan/Pakistan instability) posed to China. Some terror groups were targeting China, said MFA Asian Affairs Department Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh Division Deputy Director Cao Jing on March 4. She asked the United States for counterterrorism assistance, particularly information. Her colleague Xu Wei said "East Turkestan terrorists" threatened China's "core interests." Xu stated China was worried about the situation in Afghanistan, which appeared to be "deteriorating." CASS's Ye Hailin noted that security and stability issues in Afghanistan affect China's security. China and NATO had the "same interests," he said; terrorism "at our gate" was of "deep concern" to the PRC and "nobody wants the Taliban to return."

Terrorism at Our Gate, Now So is the War on Terror

¶4. (C) Yuan Peng, North America Director of the Ministry of State Security-affiliated Chinese Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), told A/DCM March 2 that China had noticed that the United States had shifted the "front lines" of the war on terrorism from Iraq to Afghanistan, right on the Chinese border, a development "of the deepest possible significance to China." Yuan remarked that the United States and China would have to work together "in the years to come" to ensure that the war on terrorism and the effort to promote stability in Pakistan and Afghanistan remained areas for cooperation rather than confrontation or competition between the United States and China.

¶5. (C) In separate meetings, MFA's Xu Wei and CASS's Ye Hailin each said China supported increased American troop levels in Afghanistan if the increased U.S. military presence would promote regional peace and stability. Likewise, MFA's Cao Jing said the U.S. policy review on Pakistan and Afghanistan was "a very good thing," because it involved more coordination and cooperation in tackling the Afghanistan issue.

¶6. (C) One contact was less supportive of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Peking University Professor Yu Tiejun (protect) said to PolOff on February 28, "Afghanistan is a useful buffer state" and China wanted it to be quiet and stable. However, the PRC would not like to see more U.S. bases along its border. If the United States military were to become firmly established in Afghanistan, Yu remarked, "it would be a problem" for China.

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¶7. (C) MFA-affiliated China Institute for International Studies (CIIS) South Asia scholar Rong Ying suggested on February 9 that the U.S. policy review on Pakistan and Afghanistan and the appointment of Special Representative Holbrooke had highlighted the need for the Chinese government to step up its interagency coordination on South Asia. He said that China found it much easier to criticize the past policy direction of the United States than to come up with an alternative approach. He praised the United States for considering approaching "moderate Taliban" elements, stressing that the Taliban was a "political movement and not a terrorist organization."

How Can China Help in Pakistan and Afghanistan?  
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¶8. (C) The Chinese are unclear about U.S. expectations for Chinese assistance to Afghanistan and Pakistan. CICIR's Yuan said China did not know what "concrete expectations" the United States had of China for Pakistan and Afghanistan, or what China could or should provide. CASS's Ye asked, "what do you want China to do?" CIIS's Rong also inquired what the United States seeks from China in Afghanistan.

China's Role in Afghanistan and Pakistan  
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¶9. (C) MFA's Xu Wei told PolOff that China already provided assistance to Afghanistan "within our capability." He noted that China's Ministry of Public Security has trained Afghan counternarcotics officers and donated equipment. Other Chinese aid included USD 25 million in grants to the Afghan government. Xu said China would continue its engagement in projects beneficial to the Afghan people. Construction had not yet begun on the Aynak copper mine project because of security concerns, Xu said, noting that China had urged local authorities to protect the area and "make it safe before we start."

¶10. (C) Chinese contacts say Sino-Pakistani relations are strategic and strong, and include military cooperation, Chinese investment and growing trade. CICIR's Yuan commented

that the results of Foreign Minister He Yafei's December 2008 visit to Islamabad had been encouraging, with Pakistan committing to taking no "dangerous action in the near future." Yuan mentioned that Pakistan President Asif Zardari had pledged to visit China every three months, and would travel to different provinces each time to explore economic cooperation. Yuan characterized PRC agreement to such regular Zardari visits as a Chinese step to improve Pakistan's domestic stability.

#### No Chinese Military to Afghanistan

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¶11. (C) CASS's Ye and Peking University's Yu separately said China would not send security forces (People's Liberation Army or People's Armed Police) to Afghanistan. Ye said the PLA would be ill equipped for such a venture and suspicions around the world of China's intentions in the region would be too high. Professor Yu said sending security forces to Afghanistan would "run counter to the PRC's fundamental principle of noninterference," though he conceded that global developments over the past few years had challenged this principle.  
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